

## Remarks on Hurricane Katrina Commission- September 15, 2005

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#### Establishing the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina

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Madam Speaker, high talk from the majority follows the abysmally low performance of the Federal organizations that they oversee and that our people trusted to protect them in their hour of need. And today we are told it is our constitutional duty to find out why the government was so unable to protect life here at home during and after Hurricane Katrina.

I would like to remind our friends on the other side that one of our constitutional duties as representatives of the will of the people is actually to represent the will of the people of the United States. So let the record show that as of today, according to the Republican leadership, the will of the American people no longer matters.

The fact that 76 percent of the citizens of our Nation want an independent commission to investigate the Katrina disaster does not mean a thing. The fact that over 60 percent of Republicans want an independent commission does not register with them either. Apparently, the people of the United States are to be patted on the head and told, Do not worry. We will find out what happened here.

The fact that thousands of men, women, and children are dead; the fact that hundreds of thousands more have become evacuees in the richest country in the world shows that we do not have everything under control. The fact that we cut corners and underfunded those responsible for maintaining the levees that protected New Orleans by tens of millions of dollars only so that later thousands of lives would be needlessly lost, tens of billions of dollars would have to be spent cleaning up the mess left behind shows that we do not have anything under control. That is really a case of being penny wise and pound foolish.

And now, to show how seriously it takes its constitutional responsibility to get the government back on track, to show that it is not interested solely in rhetoric but also in results, the majority has seen fit to create a partisan political body, which we all know will care more about the political survival of the leadership than the actual survival of the people.

How do we know this? Because the committee put forth by the majority is intentionally designed to be partisan. It has a Republican majority. It includes subpoena power controlled by the majority. And the scope of the investigation will be the whim of the leadership of the majority. The idea of having a truly bipartisan commission to investigate the tragedy was never seriously entertained. If it was, joint subpoena power would exist in this bill, as would joint control of the committee's operation, scope, and direction.

Instead of this, platitudes promising cooperation and shared power have filled this hall, leaving no room for a resolution calling for either a truly bipartisan committee or, what would be infinitely better, the creation of an independent commission which will actually eliminate politics from what will otherwise be an incredibly politicized investigation.

All of this is obvious to nearly every observer, and yet the leadership tells the Democrats if we are objecting to their Republican-first agenda, we, the Members of the minority, are being partisan. Apparently, in the wake of disaster comes hypocrisy.

Along with its assurances of a fair and honest investigation of the failures of the Federal response to Katrina, assurances which are the product of wishful thinking as opposed to a sincere review of recent history, the majority puts forth empty arguments in favor of this bill.

We created the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA, so only we can investigate it, they argue. That means that this leadership also helped to create the systemic problems which caused DHS and FEMA to fail. What exactly is their incentive to publicize their lack of vision and errors in judgment?

As the gentleman from California (Mr. George Miller) said earlier today, it would be like nominating Enron to investigate stock fraud because they helped to perfect it, and it would not make much sense.

But the gentleman from California (Mr. Dreier) told us this morning that none of this matters. It would be absurd, he says, to think that any Member of this body would not want to get to the bottom of the failures. Madam Speaker, more absurd things happen in this House all the time. For example, some might say that appointing a man with absolutely no experience in emergency management to head the Federal Emergency Management Association was absurd, and yet nobody challenged that appointment until it was far too late.

Madam Speaker, I do not mean to say that the chairman and his colleagues do not care about improving our national preparedness for a future emergency, because I know that they do; but the fact that political pressures have in the past and will again in the future distort and in some cases destroy investigations of government failings when the investigations are carried out by us, this is so obvious that it should be beyond question.

The only real question left before us today is why does the majority find an independent commission to investigate the tragedy so objectionable? Would any of them like to claim here that the 9/11 Commission was a mistake? They all voted for it. Should we reject the findings of that body? Should we here and now state that because it was not run by those managing the government on September 11, 2001, for that reason, what it discovered was illegitimate? Is there anyone here who would like to state for the record that the creation of the 9/11 Commission was an abdication and denial of our constitutional responsibility as Members of the House of Representatives?

Not one Member of this body would make such a claim, and yet the majority makes this claim about the creation of a

similar body to investigate what happened on the gulf coast.

There is only one explanation for it. Dare I say this absurd stance is control. The majority wants to keep the investigation under its control so it can make sure that the answers that the committee produces toe the party line. Thinking about crass political considerations when Americans are dying and are homeless, that, and only that, is an abdication of our constitutional responsibilities as Members of this Congress.